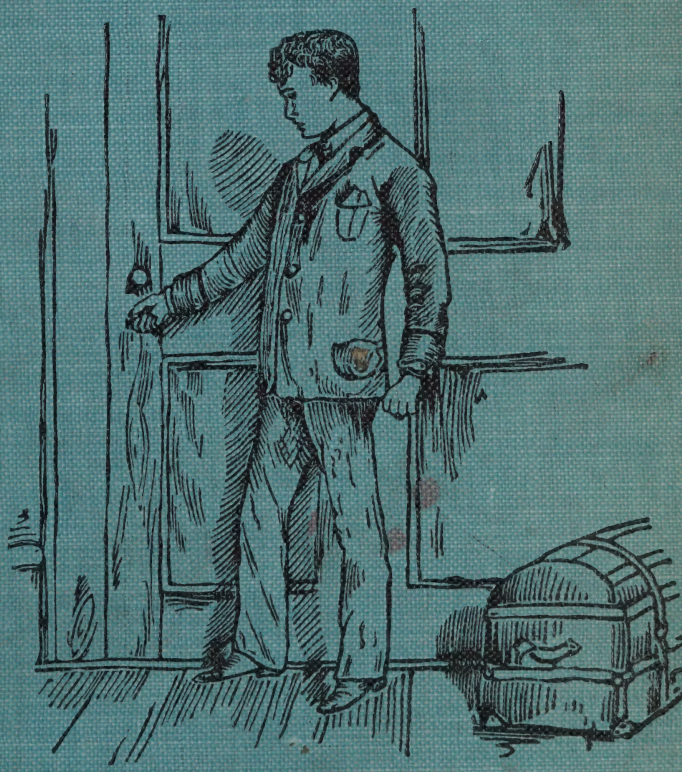
No Heroes



Blanche Willis Howard

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"'Not much!' he muttered, locking the door"

NO HEROES

BY BLANCHE WILLIS HOWARD
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JESSIE McDERMOTT
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BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge

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TO MY DEAREST LITTLE

ERWIN GUSTAV OTTO MORITZ FRANZ

"PASHA"

IN GRATITUDE AND LOVE

STUTTGART, *September, 1893*

NO HEROES.

I.

HAD Dole's Mills suspected that romantic notions ran riot beneath the shaggy tow locks of Dr. Rea's oldest boy Bob, the sober community would summarily have pronounced him shiftless, and sure to come to some bad end.

The animus of Dole's Mills was what may be politely termed conservative. Moss-covered jealousies, hoary grudges, and decrepit feuds, with a weak dilution of tittle-tattle or politics, afforded perennial entertainment to the sewing-bee sisters, and to the men gossips assembled in the grocery, amid various heavy fumes and the dim, mysterious contours of huge hogsheads. But age and familiarity had rendered these topics mild of flavor, and every-

body knew his neighbor's opinion and phrases beforehand. The place was, in short, like many another old-fashioned New England village, before the railway net draws it out of its remoteness and toward the world's great centres, yet not exclusively a placid hamlet asleep among its fields; for the rushing river induced more or less life, noise, and future prospects. Dole's Mills had, then, its contrasts and conflicting problems, as have every place and every human life, however dull they seem. The millmen were a rough yet not unkindly set. With the barges that came up to load with timber ebbed and flowed in the village interests a periodic sailor element. On the bridge-railing perched from morning till night, like large torpid birds or monstrous human barnacles, a row of the laziest men in the world, wearing the profound fatalistic imperturbability of expression characteristic of the Mussulman and the New England loafer, and looking as if neither revolutions nor dynamite could dislodge them. Opposed to their stupendous inertia, everywhere on the belt of outlying farms, was a brave

vigilant struggle with a stubborn soil which Mother Nature fashioned in no genial mood toward agriculture, however generous her gifts to commerce of forest, quarry, river, and bay, — however thoughtful of modern artists and summer idlers, in providing them with a magnificent coast-line.

Such was Bob's home, prosaic enough, indeed, without a breath of what we call higher culture stirring its stagnant atmosphere, with no Browning clubs and Ibsen lectures such as nowadays elevate the intellectuality of our smallest towns. Having no conception of these modern blessings Bob was insensible to the misfortune of living before their advent, but what he did feel strongly, in his inner silent self, was that Dole's Mills was unlike places in books. For he was a bookworm, devouring much good, much indifferent literature, and boys who read voraciously are apt to have ideas, whatever their quality. He was convinced that nothing heroic ever had happened, ever would or could happen, in Dole's Mills. Not that he was a dreamy youngster; on the contrary a hearty, noisy, rather hot-tem-

pered, freckled-faced, most unpoetic-looking youth, who, in spite of countless accidents due to the intemperate use of cold steel, had thus far succeeded in keeping his fingers and toes more or less attached to his body, and had always leaped into and out of scrapes with feline agility. He was known as a "likely" boy, and when he took the history prize at the grammar school was even called "caperble," a degree of panegyric rare in Dole's Mills, where people emulated their Puritan ancestors in sobriety of expression. Nevertheless, whether inherited with his father's warm Irish blood, or a vibration of some old tender chord which household cares and children's clamorous needs had seemingly silenced in his mother — she had named her three girl babies Melitta, Claribel May, and Irene Rosalys —Bob's soul was colored with romance and moved by generous enthusiasms. His ardent imagination revivified dramatic moments, and, while chopping and bringing in great armfuls of wood, hoeing potatoes, mending fences, milking the cow, grooming the doctor's nag, running on errands, tending the baby, and doing

everything else he could to help along, he communed habitually with heroes. Like his mother, he was a half doctor, educated by necessity to a certain deftness in applying a bandage, a knowledge of simple remedies, and common sense in the first treatment of accidents. Their modest skill was often enough required in a place where most of the children spent an enchanted existence upon rolling, bobbing logs, without the traditional immunity of Venetian infants from aquatic disasters, and where mashed thumbs, sprains, and half-drowned urchins were a matter of course. Claribel May, aged three years, had already so clear a comprehension of her share of the family responsibilities that, spying afar off a certain kind of dripping little procession, she would toddle in from the garden and announce with pleasing composure: "Mamma, here comes a drowny." Besides, there were often serious accidents in the mills, with the doctor perhaps twenty miles away, looking after a bad case on a distant farm.

So, happily, Bob's romantic flights did not pre-

vent him from being a useful boy, working hard in and out of school. But everybody was busy at his house. His mother was up early and late, somewhat pale and thin as were most women in that region, but with a fresh smile, a bright note in her voice, and a light-hearted way of solving that hydra-headed problem, how to adapt the needs of six hearty, growing children to the small pay of a country doctor.

Beyond Dole's Mills proper, Dr. Rea's rounds extended so far up and down interminable stony hills that he would work his horse until the patient beast was nearly exhausted, then leave him to his oats and well-earned repose; while, less pitiful to himself, he would start out again by night, on foot, to some poor soul in need, who would repay him it might be with nothing, or after months with a peck of tomatoes, a few eggs, or a scraggy chicken.

Coming home thus late, putting up his horse himself, — Bob being asleep, — seizing his instruments, stuffing some doughnuts into his pocket to eat on the way, he would be off again for a midnight tramp in bad weather.

"Well, Robert Rea, I should think you'd *drop!*" was his wife's habitual commiserating remark, running after him with a hasty drink of something hot, which he, standing in the porch, impatient to be off, would gulp down at one draught like a doughty cavalier of old quaffing his stirrup-cup. But Dr. Rea never dropped, nor did Mrs. Rea, nor did Bob. Dropping was not a family trait.

Bob often declared that his mother was the "best fellow" he knew, yet he privately wished she looked like Joan of Arc claiming the helmet. He would have gone through fire and water for his father, but when he jogged off in his buggy, his shabby great-coat and old broad-brimmed drab hat as familiar, weatherbeaten landmarks as the town pump and the milestone, the boy wondered how it would have seemed to be the scion of a noble house, the son of a plumed knight, breathing the bracing atmosphere of gallant deeds. He wished the saw-mills were all castles, picturesquely supplied with drawbridges, moats, and clanking men-at-arms. He thought it a pity that the straggling village street had no massive

gates, triumphal arches, and ivy-mantled towers; that the hills beyond could boast no proud, undaunted mountaineers defying the tyrant. He liked Dole's Mills, of course; it was his home, and there was much there well worth having,—big barns full of hay, for instance, the logs on the river, splendid sawdust, the good, clean wood-smell, trout in the brook, berries in the fields, sweet-fern cigars, swimming, tricks, fun, fights, and other things, each alluring in its season. But all the same, no heroes: only his papa, and old Hawkes the lawyer, and Mr. Stebbins the parson, and Mrs. Tobin the postmistress, and Deacon Butterfield, and Drinkwater the grocer, and a few more of that sort, and the mill-hands; and — it could n't be helped of course — but what sort of a show did they make, beside Alaric, king of the Visigoths, and the Caliph Haroun Alraschid, and the Marquis of Montrose?

One June, Bob was graduated from the Dole's Mills Academy. At its closing exercises, he distinguished himself by a magnificent oration upon one of those tremendous moral themes which no mature

writer approaches without trepidation, but which schoolchildren blithely charge with maiden lances.

After the vacation, which Bob intended to squeeze dry, he was to prepare himself for college, where, large as the undertaking would be for the Rea exchequer, the doctor was determined to send his boys. Bob would work his way as far as possible, and earn something — somewhere — somehow — every vacation. These prospects looked enticing to him, and in no respect arduous. Ruminating upon his good luck, secretly elated to be a person of so much importance, especially in the presence of his brothers and that pert Melitta, he listened one day at dinner, as his father and a friend from a neighboring town discussed their plans for their boys.

"I 'm uneasy about my Harry," the guest said, thoughtfully contemplating the five children beaming with life and high spirits, while Irene Rosalys — exiled to an adjoining room, because her eccentric code of table manners was apt to incite her brothers to immoderate and helpless laughter — was remarking "Goo-goo" with that self-sustaining philosophy attainable only by a faultlessly healthy infant.

"From Rob down to your baby there, all brilliantly well. How do you do it, Rea?"

"I'm afraid they look like a row of fat prize squashes at the county fair," the doctor returned. "I don't know how we do it, except with plenty of cold water, fresh air, simple food, early hours, work enough, and no coddling."

"Precisely!" exclaimed the judge; "and my poor boy is coddled unmercifully, stuffed with sweets, up too late at night, nothing to do, and not a wish ungratified. When he comes into a room somebody rushes to close a window for fear a draught will blow on him. They won't let him exercise, for he might fatigue himself. They are making a hypochondriac and a muff of him. He is at heart a good, kind, merry fellow, but he's getting listless, supercilious, and selfish as a cormorant. How can he help it! The only child in our ridiculously large family, with two sets of well-preserved grandparents, three youngish uncles, and five maiden aunts, all prostrate before him. Why, he's a perfect Turk, that boy!"

Dr. Rea broke into a hearty laugh. Judge Laughton looked at him ruefully.

"I don't wonder you laugh. Sometimes I laugh myself, as if I were at a farce, when I see his jack-anapes airs toward his adorers. But you will agree it is finally no laughing matter."

"Send him to us for a while since you approve our methods," suggested Mrs. Rea kindly. "Our boys won't spoil him."

"One could expect that benevolent idea only from a busy person," the judge replied warmly. "If you want a service done, go to somebody who is overworked. Idle people never have any time. But I could n't think of adding Harry to your cares. Then I have a plan. It 's what you doctors would call heroic treatment."

"I shall be glad to hear it," said Dr. Rea. "A boy with a broad chest may survive such adulation, although it 's apt to make a brute of him, but Harry is too slight and frail for it."

"If you 've lost two boys you 're anxious when you see everything going wrong with your remaining child. Fear is, in fact, the secret of the injudicious system at our house. Our doctor says Harry has

grown too rapidly, but there is nothing radically wrong with him. Because his brothers died of the results of scarlet fever, Hal must be credited with weak lungs, a faulty heart-action, over-excitable nerves, and heaven knows what. They make him self-conscious, unamiable, and discontented. They stuff him till his stomach rebels, then declare his heart is not strong. 'Heart! Nonsense, it 's not heart, it 's *jam!*' I tell them. 'Give him some castor-oil.' They look at me in sad reproach. Every day there 's a new theory. They hold a mirror continually before him."

"Fatal!" exclaimed the doctor. "Better turn him out to rough it in the backwoods."

"Or — on a voyage. That is what I want to discuss with you. You must pardon me for making a long tale of my grievances, but I 'm anxious to show you the situation and have your advice. He 's fairly good in his studies, learns easily, but I 'm not willing he should fit himself for college for a year at least. Now I know the captain of a good brig, a trustworthy man, and I 'm thinking of packing

Harry off on a cruise to Cuba and the West Indies to escape from the mistaken indulgence of his relatives and take his chance like a man on the Beautiful Bess. He would spend some months in Cuba, visit the other islands, and return by the same ship in the spring. Captain Noyce knows a good place for him to stay where he 'd be looked after, but not smothered with attention."

"Would you send him alone?" asked Mrs. Rea.

"In my desperation I would n't hesitate. He 'd be in the captain's care, who 'd make all suitable arrangements. But Mrs. Laughton insists on a companion. It is hard for her to part with him, but she knows that Harry regards himself as too important in the scheme of the universe, and that he ought to be sent somewhere to find his level and open his eyes, for it 's out of the question to hope to reform one's brothers, sisters, and relatives in their daily treatment of our fifteen-year-old spoiled darling. And now I 'm searching for the companion. In my mind's eye I see him: twenty-two or three, fresh from college, somebody who 'd like the post and have a

healthful influence on my boy. You don't know anybody, do you, — agreeable, well-educated, high-principled, in short, an ideal companion?"

"I fear we have no such phœnix here. Anybody as accomplished as all that would n't waste himself on us."

"That's a pity, for I must find my paragon within two weeks. The Beautiful Bess sails on July 15th."

His glance rested casually on Bob, who sat opposite. The boy was quite pale. In one hand he grasped a knife, in the other a baked potato, both motionless as marble, while, unmindful of the delighted, flippant *sotto voce* giggles and jeers of Ned, Phil, that pert Melitta, and, in monkey-like imitation, even little Claribel May, with lips apart and dilated eyes he listened transfixed.

The Beautiful Bess, bound for the West Indies! What did that mean but ropes, bare-throated sailors, waves mountain-high, the foretop-gallant sail, the flying-jib, "Shiver my timbers," "Aye, aye, sir," a yoho-ing and hoist-away-ing, banyan-trees, date-

palms, jungles, pirates of the Spanish main, crocodiles, alligators, sharks, African elephants, Bengal tigers, the source of the Nile, the pyramids of Egypt, snowy Himalaya peaks, camels, sheiks, temples, mosques, and all things strange, wonderful, tropical, nautical, and glorious!

Confused, flitting, entrancing pictures unfolded themselves and dissolved in his warm fancy, while he stared spell-bound at the guest. The judge's careless glance grew searching. He looked long at Bob, questioningly at Dr. Rea, again at Bob, and finally said: —

"How would you like to go, Rob? Sixteen is young, but it occurs to me a good comrade might be better for Harry than a tutor, and I'd rather have you than a paragon. Would you let him go, Rea? Would you?" turning to Bob's mother.

Surprised, Dr. Rea hesitated, thoughtfully weighing *pros* and *cons*, realizing how important it was that Bob should as soon as possible be independent and helping his brothers, how long and inconvenient his absence would seem, yet dwelling upon the

charm of the voyage, and the promise of these fresh, rich experiences. Could they deny Bob this privilege? He was a good boy, and had had an unusual amount of care and work for his age. Ought they not to let him seize this happy chance?

"I must think about it," he said at length.

"It would be beautiful for you, Robbie," Mrs. Rea murmured bravely.

"If, instead of the paragon, I take Bob, you must allow me to make the same business arrangements."

"Oh, as to that — between old friends" — the doctor began.

"On this point," returned the judge, "I'm sure I'm right. It won't be a bed of roses. I've told you plainly Harry is unreasonable. If Bob accepts the responsibility and I take his time, he must n't lose by it."

"Our Bob is n't the fellow to stand any cheap talk!" Ned suddenly informed the astonished guest.

"Not much," added little Phil. "He'd up and give him a couple quicker 'n you can swing a cat."

"Children!" exclaimed Mrs. Rea rebukingly, while the judge smiled at the glaring, belligerent little boys, who evidently objected to the mere idea of letting any one except themselves abuse Bob.

"It is so long since I swung a cat I cannot properly estimate the rapidity of the vengeance that would overtake Harry, nor its precise nature; but I know it's the sort of thing he needs. Rob, you say nothing. We are playing Hamlet without the Dane. Would you like to go, if your papa and mamma are willing?"

Would he like to go!

Bewildered, rapturous, hearing his heart thumping in his ears, he hung his head, stared at his plate, and, with a gruff voice that sounded to him as if it issued from some other boy's throat, mumbled: —

"I don't know."

Before evening, everything was arranged. Bob was to join Harry on the 14th, and sail for Cuba the following day on the Beautiful Bess.

II.

BOB leaned his elbows on the window sill and stared at the great elm near the house, at the honeysuckle climbing up the veranda-trellis and almost into his room, at the kitchen garden and corn patch sloping down toward the fields, beyond which was the river shining like a silver ribbon.

When your trunk was packed to go to foreign countries you seemed to see everything clearer than before, somehow. Or did mamma always look so pale and as if she had something on her mind? Was papa always so queer? Probably they generally were like that; probably everything only seemed odd to him because he was going away. He wondered what sort of fellow Harry was. It was a jolly thing to go on a splendid voyage and earn some money besides; be well paid for what you 'd

rather do than anything else on earth. It was good, too, they were going to peg a little at Latin and Greek, for it was no use getting rusty and having to work harder later. Such a small dose as an hour a day they could stand very well, and have oceans of time to see sights and pick up Spanish. Oranges were so soft down there, they dug 'em out with teaspoons. Would n't he gorge! Well, yes, rather! He smacked his lips, and smiled a big, broad smile of luscious anticipation.

The breath of honeysuckles filled the room. There was new-mown hay in an adjacent field.

"I 'm going to smell better things," exulted Bob; "tar, and salt water, and — foreign smells!"

He glanced at his collection of butterflies and birds' eggs in their glass cases.

"Wait till you see what I bring back from my voyage. You 'll be nowhere, then."

He liked his little room. He had papered it himself with the brightest blue paper he could find. It was adorned with newspaper illustrations of boat-races and heads of animals. He had carved the

bookcase, and shot that stuffed hawk. The room was part of himself and his past. But the small stout leather trunk, locked and strapped and thirsting for adventure, that he loved better still. That meant the fascinating, marvelous, unknown future so soon to open before him. He patted it with a fond and lingering touch.

Ah, how good it was, that this had come to him! He knelt on the floor and stretched his head far out the window. At three o'clock the stage would come lumbering along that road just as usual, but this time it would stop for him and his trunk, and carry them off to — glory, hallelujah! Oh, how glad, — how glad, glad, glad he was! The very gladdest boy on earth!

He heard the rattling of dishes and his father's voice: —

"It is going to be ugly business, I fear, and I shall miss Bob more than a little, but I'm thankful he'll escape."

"The dear boy has n't a suspicion. I charged the children to say nothing; then he is so absorbed in

his own happiness. Do try to eat, Robert. A swallow of tea at least. Up the greater part of three nights, working like a galley slave, no sleep, no food, that is n't reasonable."

The voices rose, low but distinct, from the veranda. Bob involuntarily craned his neck to listen.

"We need help. It has broken out in malignant form among the millmen. Ten fresh cases to-day; no hospital, no barracks, no nurses. Deacon Butterfield and John Drinkwater tell me they will go anywhere and do anything I say. Drinkwater offers groceries too, and Mr. Hawkes is putting up some sort of barracks at his own expense. I meet but one spirit, — everybody is eager to give and help. They are kindness itself. But nurses I must have. Smallpox beginning in this way, on all sides, means a siege. I shall have the trained men I sent for in two or three days, but must find somebody immediately for Jerry Nichols. He is hard hit, the worst yet. Butterfield and Drinkwater are too old. I 'm using them in lighter cases. If I can get nobody else, I shall stay with him myself to-night."

"No, Robert, you 'll do nothing of the sort. I 'll go. I can perfectly."

"We 'll see, my dear. Perhaps I shall find somebody. I 'll make another search directly. If I drive out to the Forbes farm, Eben might come. But I shall have to ask him myself. That 's the awkward part of it. I ought to be in a dozen places at this moment. It was a mere chance I spied the red handkerchief which Nichols had the wit to hang out. I was a good distance off on the wood-road. Nobody wants to go down there, two miles away, to poor crabbed old Nichols. Where 's the boy? The stage will be along soon."

"In his room. He was with us all until a little while ago. He is so gloriously happy it does one good to see him, in contrast to all this trouble."

"Will you put up those things for me at once, please? Plenty of old linen and the salve. Let Melitta make more. Keep her at it. We can't have too much. Some of the women are so helpless. Have Phil come to the study in fifteen minutes to take a note over to Mr. Hawkes. Let him say good-

by to Bob before he goes. And I 'd like Phil later to run over to Drinkwater's. Let Bob come to me as soon as Phil is out of the house. I shall be relieved, when Bob is fairly off. The truth is, I want to send him this minute to rout out a man nurse for old Jerry. Perhaps young Forbes would come for Bob. The poor old fellow lies heavy on my conscience, and Bob would be sure to discover somebody. I shall miss the boy at every step, but I must get used to it."

Bob stared still at the drooping elm branches, but with unseeing eyes. Motionless, on his knees, his head stretched out rigidly, he tried to grasp what had happened.

Something bad had come. It was true, then, that papa looked tired and anxious, and mamma paler than usual. There was no mistake. He did n't know anything about smallpox, but papa was n't apt to borrow trouble and call things "ugly business" without very good reason. Everybody was helping, even those old mud-turtles, Butterfield and Hawkes and Drinkwater; and Jerry the miser was the worst

yet, off there alone in his queer little shanty; and that pert Melitta was making salve, and the boys scooting about on errands, and Eben Forbes, who was n't so very old (only about twenty and three months), was going to help; and he — he was going to "escape," — *escape*, that was the very word papa had said; going off sailing, and loafing, and fooling, and sneaking, while they were all slaving at home!

He rose, walking slowly and heavily, his face flushed and dogged.

"Not much!" he muttered, locking the door. He looked at the four blue walls and the treasures to which his eager spirit had already bidden a joyous farewell and left miles behind, the eggs, the butterflies, the hawk, and all. There they were. There he was. But the joy was gone.

In the middle of the floor stood the little strapped trunk, its expression as cheerfully adventurous as if no catastrophe had occurred. Bob threw himself down, put his head on it an instant, and one deep sob broke from his over-full heart. He shook himself angrily, loosened the straps, lifted the lid, and

began with hasty, nervous motions to take out the neat piles his mother had deftly and lovingly packed.

Here were his best shirts. Here the thinner socks for Cuba. This white linen suit mamma had had made, with a world of pains. They wore them down there. She could n't get exactly the right stuff. She said it was for warm weather in Havana. They had little tables in a gay square and coffee and music. There was the flannel dressing-gown for his berth. He had laughed and said it looked like an old woman and he did n't need it, but papa told him he might be very glad of it, and of this waterproof thing, a cap with a kind of skirt behind to button on and wear when there was a storm at sea. A storm at sea! Bob stopped, swallowed hard, and groaned aloud.

The trunk was empty. The little piles lay on the floor. He seized them, tossed them into his chest of drawers and on the closet shelves, — anywhere out sight. Presently not a vestige of them was visible, only the yawning trunk.

How that honeysuckle smelled! So sickish-sweet, it made a fellow feel queer at the pit of his stomach.

He softly opened the door and listened. Voices below, none near. Shouldering the trunk, he went lightly up the garret stairs, deposited it in its place among venerable colleagues, crept into the darkest nook in the whole garret, extended his most miserable self full length, wept long and passionately, put his fingers in his ears that he might not hear the stage go by, and fought out the first real battle of his life.

As the stage drew near, his mother and the boys had called him, and searched for him in much excitement. Phil even came up and looked about the garret, but did not perceive the prostrate figure behind old furniture and in the dusk under the eaves. An hour later, tired as if he had been beaten, and with puffed nose and eyelids, Bob marched downstairs. The children met him in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Hey! Got left, did n't you?" Ned shouted derisively.

"Shut up!" returned Bob, reaching out vindictively and boxing the first ear which got in his way. It happened to be Melitta's.

Unmindful of the tumult, he strode sternly on. His father sat at his study-table writing rapidly. Some patients were just leaving. Mrs. Rea stood near, a cup in her hand. She restrained an exclamation, and looked at him without a word as he advanced to his father's side.

"Here 's your man nurse for Jerry the miser," he said abruptly.

Dr. Rea rose; saw every line of the tear-stained, swollen face; saw the wrinkled coat covered with dust and dirt and straggling bits of cobweb; saw into his child's soul.

Turning away, he walked to a window and looked out some minutes. The tall clock ticked loud in the silence.

"Rob," he began at length, so tenderly, so pitifully that the boy thought his heart would break, "think well. There is still time to reconsider. The stage is gone, but I can send you over. You 'll never have this chance again."

"I 'm not going. I 'm going to stay here," Bob said grimly.

"Your last word?"

"My last word every time."

"Good. Stay, then," the doctor returned quietly. "I accept your decision. But you must write at once to Judge Laughton."

Bob looked desperate. This was beyond his strength. He could give up the voyage, trample on his heart's desire, but he could n't write letters about it. His mother came rapidly, kissed him, and stroked back the rough locks falling over his forehead. There were tears in her eyes. He wished she would n't!

"I 'll write, dear."

"Thanks awfully, mamma," he said stoutly, after a queer gulp.

"May I go to Jerry, papa? Now — this very minute?"

"I think we won't be quite so impetuous, Bob. We 'll stop long enough to take breath, and look over the situation, before we commit ourselves for better, for worse. The truth is, you don't know what you are saying. You are exceedingly young for such work."

"Well, old Drinkwater is exceedingly old, is n't he? Can't I do it as well as he can?"

"Possibly, in some respects. But he is patient. He would hold out."

"I'll be patient. I'll hold out."

"You can help me in a great many other ways."

"But I stayed to help you in this way," Bob retorted hotly.

"I know, my dear boy, I know," his father replied with a world of comprehension in his voice. "Yet it may be wiser to try to get Eben Forbes for Jerry. Eben will come, I think, for me. And you can help me in innumerable other things."

"Does n't the one that nurses Jerry help you the most?" Bob broke out, excited, hurt, and bitterly disappointed. "You said as much just now. Why do you want Eben? He 's only about four years and eleven months older than me. I don't call that much. Besides you have n't got him yet. It will take two hours to go out to the Forbes farm, and two hours to get back. That 's four whole hours, and you need the buggy here. And then you don't

know surely whether he 'll come. He likes you, I know, and says he 'll do anything for you. But perhaps he is n't there. Perhaps — perhaps he 's gone to Boston. Perhaps he 's broken his leg. Perhaps their chimney 's burning. Perhaps they 've got the smallpox themselves!" he concluded with emphasis, a grim smile flitting across his troubled face, as if he found something sustaining in his final supposition.

The doctor was silent. There was some sense in Bob's argument. They could not be sure of Eben, and in any event it would be late in the evening before he could be secured.

"You see you have n't got Eben, and you have got me," resumed the boy, responding unconsciously to his father's thought. "Me" in Bob's estimation was evidently a person of considerable importance, with no little self-confidence and determination.

Meanwhile Mrs. Rea had returned, and from Bob's last remark perceived how matters stood.

"I 've written the letter, and sent Melitta to post it," she said.

Bob's flushed face took a deeper hue, and he wished fervently that hearts and throats and a fellow's other internal organs, that thump and gulp inconveniently loud at wrong moments, knew enough to sit still and behave themselves. He seemed to see the Beautiful Bess with all sails spread, speeding away from him on a Prussian-blue ocean.

"Now—*father!*" he said imploringly. "I must go to Jerry. I must, you know."

"Shall we let him try?" Dr. Rea asked his wife.

"I think Robbie will do well," she returned cheerfully. "He has a lighter hand than Eben. A light hand is a very good thing in a sick-room. It seems right to me to let him go, Robert. I don't think it will hurt him," she added, with the same brave smile she had worn when Cuba was proposed. "I am willing if you are."

Bob gave her a quick, grateful glance.

"I will trust you, Bob," the doctor said gravely. "But remember, you have chosen freely. You, not we, have taken the initiative in this matter. A gen-

erous impulse is one thing; patient, unswerving devotion to duty — a repugnant duty, too — is another. And if you are not perfectly patient you might as well be in Cuba. One has to take ill people as one finds them, which is often enough out-and-out disagreeable and unreasonable. Not every mortal in pain has enough heart culture to be considerate of his nurse's feelings, and unfortunately poor old Jerry has none that is perceptible even when he is well. So whatever he says or does, never forget that he is suffering cruelly, and that it is a matter of honor for you to do your best for him. You voluntarily assume a man's duties. Then act like a man from first to last. I repeat, it will be hard, the hardest work you ever did. But you have chosen. I trust you. Don't let me repent it."

"I won't," Bob declared sturdily, giving his father's hand a good grip.

"And no regrets and bitter feelings when it's too late?"

"Oh, papa," the boy exclaimed — his conflicting emotions making his voice sound queer and obsti-

nate, for he longed to be all that his father desired, yet, still beholding that tantalizing, splendid ship under full sail, wished frantically it would sail out of sight forever — "I've told you I'd stay, and I will stay and nothing else; and I am going to take care of Jerry the miser, and do it all right too, just as well as old Drinkwater or Eben Forbes or any other fellow, and you 'll see. But my feelings — my feelings," he stammered helplessly — "well, I can't promise much about them, because I never know what they 'll get up and do; but they shan't hurt Jerry, anyhow, and they are inside me, papa, and they are my own, you know; and if I keep right outside, nobody need mind them, and please tell me what I 'm to do so I can go to Jerry right away!"

Dr. Rea suppressed a smile.

"I will give you your instructions in an hour. There are people waiting to see me, and I must go out soon, too. Meanwhile, mamma will be putting a few things together for you, while you cool down a little," he added kindly. "You go up to your room or out in the garden, and read for a while. Then

mamma will give you a good supper. When I come back I will tell you precisely what to do and what to avoid. You will obey me to the letter in your duties to Jerry and to yourself. While you prove worthy of your post you may remain. But when you come for orders I want you cool and reasonable. I agree not to interfere with your feelings. I know that they must seethe and bubble just now. But keep them well 'inside' you, Bob. A 'man nurse' can't carry a tempest in his face and voice. That is the first thing you have to learn."

At the words "man nurse" Bob straightened himself visibly.

"All right, papa," he said in a steady tone; "I'll cool off. And mamma," he added solemnly, "perhaps you'd better keep those children out of my way."

III.

HIS heart sore with disappointment, his intentions toward Jerry the most virtuous in the world, Bob walked into the ill man's room, and said politely: —

"Good-evening, Jerry. I've come to take care of you. I'm your nurse, you know. I hope you're feeling well this evening," he added brightly, with a vague remembrance that he had somewhere read one ought always to be very cheerful and encouraging in a sick-room.

"Luddy!" groaned the patient, turning his poor spotted, swollen face toward the boy, and blinking at him with eyes that could hardly see. "Bob Rea, as sure as you're born! Can't they do no better 'n thet fur a sufferin' feller-creeter? Can't they sen' 'long a full-grown man? Luddy, Luddy!"

"Oh, come now, I say," Bob began hotly, but

stopped short, recalling his father's parting injunctions, particularly the clear note of warning in "if you're not perfectly patient, you might as well be in Cuba." So he smothered the indignant harangue which rose to his lips, and said conciliatingly: —

"Well, you see, Jerry, there are n't a great many men nurses about anyhow, and ever so many people are down with smallpox, and papa has told me just what to do for you, and I can do it like a book — you just wait and see! — and I shall be better than old Drinkwater by a long shot, for his fingers are all thumbs, fat thumbs, too, and I'm not to mind when you are disagreeable, papa says, but I do hope you'll be as civil as you can, because" —

"Oh, Luddy," muttered the old man, exasperated, "gimme some water, can't yer, an' stop thet jaw."

Bob stopped it with a snap to stifle the retort which he longed to fling at this unbearable old party. It was really not at all easy to establish courteous relations with Jerry, for in addition to his present inflammable mood, there were reminiscences of years

of teasing on the one side, and abusive language on the other, of snow-balling and mud-pelting and hooting and tricks, which made company manners between the two rather difficult of attainment.

However, Bob resolved to be as parliamentary and diplomatic as possible, and crossed the room quickly to fill a water-glass, but nearly dropped the pitcher, he was so startled to hear from a dark corner above his head a wild and riotous "Ha, ha, ha!" followed by a queer rasping, mournful voice, distinctly saying, "Where 's Milly? Milly 's dead. Poor Milly! Dead, dead, dead!"

"Why, Jerry, I never knew you had a parrot," Bob cried with enthusiasm.

"Water!" called Jerry irascibly. After drinking, he said: "Give Noah some, will you, in his dish up there? But, Bob Rea, don't you tetch him, don't you dare to hurt him, don't you do nothin' to my Noah!"

"Hurt your parrot?" retorted Bob indignantly. "What an old duffer you are!"

"Well, yer need n't be so huffy about it, need yer?

Take a cheer an' si' down, an' make yerself to hum. If yev gut to stay, why stay yer must. But they might hev sen' 'long a full-grown man, an' not jess a sassy boy, an' thet I shell allers say," Jerry concluded with withering contempt.

There was but one chair, a hard straight-backed one, upon which Bob, somewhat subdued by the surpassing ungraciousness of his reception, seated himself, after giving Jerry his medicine and broth and deftly cooling the poor face and breast with Melitta's ointment, as his papa had instructed him.

It was growing dark. He lighted a candle, shaded it, and scrutinized the patient with much curiosity. Jerry had fallen into a feverish, troubled nap. His nose looked like the stuffed hawk's. His chest was laboring, his nostrils dilating with rapid movements. His brows were bushy. His face, always hard and mean, was covered with ugly red blotches, and his knotty, clawlike hands worked restlessly in his sleep.

"He 's probably the worst-looking old chap on earth," Bob reflected with serious satisfaction.

Noah was a wise and well-conducted bird, who did

"He's . . . the worst-looking old chap on earth"

not usually converse after dark, but excited by the presence of a stranger, dimly conscious something unusual was happening, he lifted up his mournful voice at intervals with the strange refrain: "Pretty Milly. Milly's dead. Poor Milly. Dead, dead, dead!" and Bob, stiffly and conscientiously erect, thinking of the Beautiful Bess and all he had lost, rubbing his eyes and struggling manfully to stay awake, wondering where in the world Jerry kept his money-bags and things, would often nod, until Noah's "Where's Milly?" would rouse him, when he would start and glance guiltily at his patient. So the long, uncomfortable night wore on, his ministrations alternating with desperate efforts to sit bolt upright, but speedily nodding, slipping, sliding, lurching, and haunted by half-waking dreams of drowning and being devoured by ghastly monsters of the deep, from whose clutches Noah's croaking hilarity or moan for "poor Milly" frequently rescued him.

He and the bird were friends from the start. It was good company to hear his beak and movements on his perch, and pleasant to feel that somebody

else was awake too. Moreover, the parrot was tropical. Strange after all that he should find something tropical in old Jerry's house. But who was poor Milly, who was dead, dead, dead? Surely not anybody that ever belonged to that old curmudgeon.

Toward dawn, Bob, unused to vigils and overfatigued by the struggle and excitement of the day, fell into the dense sleep of a healthy boy making up for lost time, and did not hear Jerry's querulous feeble voice, until claws closing round his finger and a friendly peck recalled him to his duties. Before, he had suspected that Noah was human; now, he knew it.

"I tol' yer so," whined Jerry. "Why don't they sen' me a full-grown man, somebuddy with fac'lty? What makes yer shet everythin' up and keep it so dark? Jess open them shetters. What made yer tetch em? Why don't yer light a candle or suthin'? Pooty nuss, I shell allers say, to snooze and snooze, an' let me lie here in the dark an' yell at yer, an' I hev n't hed a wink o' sleep all night!"

"I have n't touched your old shutters; catch me

keeping any air out of this cooped-up stuffy place! It 's not dark either. It 's growing lighter every minute," Bob retorted wrathfully.

"But why don't I see? What 's the matter with me?" shrieked the old man.

For an instant Bob was somewhat frightened. He found Jerry simply detestable, and was by no means so moved by pity and tender comprehension of the sufferer's infirmities that he could bear with angel tolerance whatever offensive language the old man chose to fling at him. He never remembered being ill in his life except when he had the measles, which he hugely enjoyed because he got such good things to eat. But it was hard lines and no mistake that the old chap could n't see.

"Now look here, Jerry," he said in a fatherly tone, intended to be eminently agreeable and reassuring, "you 'll have to grin and bear it, you know. Papa was afraid you 'd lose your sight for some days. That 's what 's the matter. But if you behave yourself and keep a stiff upper lip and do what I tell you, you 'll come out all right."

"How do you know?" wailed Jerry, but little impressed by his young nurse's sagacity.

"Pooh!" returned Bob grandly. "What 's the use of being a doctor's boy, if you don't know that!"

"It 's easy enough to stan' there an' jaw an' brag. You ain't mortal sick. You ain't eaten up with fever. You ain't gut horrible shootin' pains in yer back an' yer legs. Yer face it don' burn like brimstun, an' yer eyes, they ain't all blinded up. Oh, Luddy, Luddy!"

It seemed to Bob he should n't mind the words if the voice was not so exasperatingly full of hatefulness, or perhaps he would n't mind the voice if the words were different, but the combination was too much for any fellow's patience. He disliked Jerry roundly, and more intensely every moment, and while the old man ought not to be blamed for not knowing about the Beautiful Bess, it did seem tough to lose everything foreign and glorious and have to swallow his insolence to boot. But when Bob for some minutes had silently watched the repugnant,

miserable old being groaning now in darkness, the boy's irritation passed away.

"Jerry," he began at length, in a firm, calm tone, "there 's nothing the matter with your ears anyhow, so you just listen a bit and then chew your cud for a while. In the first place it 's not my fault that you are ill and I 'm well, so you 'd better stop throwing that in my face all the time. If you are such a fool as not to be vaccinated properly, I can't help it. There are two things I 'm not to blame for, and you 'd better give us a rest on them. I know it must be an awful grind to have the smallpox. Though I never had it myself, I can see that it 's not much fun. But you 've got it, Jerry, you 've got it, you know, sure pop, and it 's no use crying over spilt milk. Now you brace up and pay attention. There are a great many pleasanter ways of spending the summer vacation than living here with you, and I should think you 'd understand that yourself. I did n't come here at all on your account, you know, but just to help my papa. He was hard-worked enough without trotting from Dan to Beersheba for a nurse for you.

Nobody wanted to come, and no wonder, and he almost was coming himself, so I came. Now you know why I 'm here. Another thing, — I 'll stand as much as I can, because papa says I 've got to be patient and you can't help feeling as sharp as a cross-cut saw, but I won't be your door-mat, sick or no sick."

This was the longest speech that Bob had ever made in his life except at the graduating exercises of the academy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Noah.

Jerry began to whimper.

"Here, take a swallow of wine and water!" Bob continued with the same patriarchal manner. "Your nerves are weak. When you have the smallpox your nerves never feel very comfortable, you know. Now I 'm going out."

"You ain't a-goin' to leave me?" cried Jerry in a great fright.

"No, *sir!* I 'm your nurse and I 've come to stay. I shall hang on till you 're well. But if you make it too hot for me, I 'll have to pay you back when you

are on your feet again. You make a note of that, Jerry. Now cheer up and think of something pleasant. I shall not be gone very long. Papa says I am to go out every morning and evening for a while, because it 's stuffy and smelly in here, you know, and I 'm to have a swim every day, too, the river is so jolly near. You nibble away at the fodder I 've given you, and then you 'll be sure to see that you 'd better keep a decent tongue in your head, and we shall get along first-rate."

Whistling and with his hands in his pockets, he strode away. His remarks, delivered from first to last without a trace of excitement, may have lacked tact, tenderness, and choice diction, but they certainly tended to promote a better understanding. He stretched himself comfortably under a large beech-tree, slept nearly an hour, awoke refreshed, took a plunge in the river, and when Dr. Rea arrived, he found his son ready to report with the composed and business-like air of an old hospital nurse.

Jerry indulged in bitter complaint of Bob's youth, sleepiness, "sassiness," and general unfitness for the

duties he had assumed, as well as in a tirade against the heartlessness of Dole's Mills in not sending a full-grown man to an afflicted feller-creeter. Before the doctor could reply in his soothing fashion, Bob called out cheerfully: —

"One against you, Jerry! You look out when you are well again. I'm keeping tally now, you know;" whereupon the old man's plaint dropped into a minor key and speedily died off in vague mumblings.

Bob followed his father out to the buggy. The doctor eyed him keenly.

"How do you get on, my boy?"

"All right, papa."

"Jerry 's cross enough, is n't he?"

"Well, he 's rather tricky and hard on the bit, but I guess I 've got a grip on him now."

His father smiled.

"Be gentle with him, Bob. He 's a very ill man. And follow my instructions to the letter."

"Oh, I'm awfully gentle, papa," the boy assured him in good faith. "I would n't hurt him for any-

thing. And I'm nursing him beautifully. I've done everything on the stroke of the minute. Sometimes he fights off, but when I come with my broth, or wine, or quinine, or milk, or anything, down his throat it has to go. I shall want more salve soon, and oh, papa, please tell mamma if she does n't mind I 'd rather have more pie and less bread. Pie tastes so jolly good in the night."

He watched the buggy disappear behind the trees, and something not far removed from homesickness crept into his heart. It seemed a long, long time since yesterday, when his trunk stood packed and strapped for Cuba; long since he had left his home for Jerry's house instead of for lovely foreign lands. It was hot in there, too, and smelly — well, rather! Probably if he liked Jerry, it would be easier work taking care of him. When you liked them, you probably did n't mind pawing them every minute and pouring things down their throats. He only wished he could forget the Beautiful Bess, and the waves, and Harry strutting about on deck like a peacock. It made being cooped up a thousand times

worse. And papa did n't want him to read at first, either. Well, he was n't "escaping," anyhow. Not much! He had n't sneaked off, thank fortune. And he 'd pull Jerry through and make him swallow his things like clockwork. Papa should see.

In all Bob's meditations, in the weariness, vexation, disgust, and depression of the weeks that followed, when, instead of ploughing the foaming billows, like a viking or a corsair or any of those fellows, he found himself, during hot July weather, imprisoned in a squalid room with an irritable and incredibly thankless old man, he derived a subtle consolation from remembering that Jerry was a miser. For Bob's temperament could get more solid enjoyment out of nursing a perverse and inhumanly mean old miser if only his ways were full of secrecy than in ministrations to the most benevolent and angelic butcher, baker, or candlestick-maker — in short to any person whose mode of life was not wrapped in mystery.

But where were Jerry's treasures? Except a tin box of hard-tack for Noah, there was no trace of

anything concealed in the two poor rooms, and Bob had scrutinized floor and walls well, longing to find a secret cupboard or a trap-door.

Where were the nuggets, the chests of glittering ducats, the solid silver bars, the ropes of rubies and pearls, the diamonds and bags of gold dust? Buried, of course. They always buried them.

IV.

SOMETIMES it almost seemed like being on a desert island, Bob's life in Jerry's house was so far removed from people, except that a desert island would have been unalloyed bliss, which Jerry's house emphatically was not. The only mortal he saw beside Jerry — and Noah — was the doctor. How hungrily the boy watched every morning for the first glimpse of the buggy on the edge of the woods, and for that once scorned, now adored, old drab hat! How lovable his father's face and voice and whole presence were, Bob felt with good strong heart-beats, though he would have been in a sorry plight had he been asked to put such feelings into words. "I think the world of papa, and no mistake," he was moved to admit in his midnight cogitations on men and things. "He 's got pluck and grit, and works no end,—

and he 's carrying all Dole's Mills on his shoulders just now. If he 'd only lived in a better time and a place with something rousing going on, he might have been somebody or other — a kind of hero or something; but of course he never got a chance at anything great. More 's the pity."

He always tried to prolong the private interview at the door, would follow the doctor down to the buggy, eying him wistfully, dreading his departure, and asking all sorts of questions about the family and the village and the bad cases — anything to detain him a moment longer.

Just before the doctor drove off one morning he said suddenly: —

"How about those 'feelings,' Bob?"

"Oh, I don't know," the boy muttered, flushing.

"Because I think it 's about time to tell you that I 've had a long letter from the judge, and he" —

"Oh don't, papa, — please *don't!*"

"You don't want to know what he says?"

"No, I don't!" Bob exclaimed passionately. "I don't want to know anything about them. I want to be let alone. I 'm here, and I would n't be anywhere else for forty million Cubas, but — " he hesitated, angry that his voice broke and that his eyes were hot and wet — "you see, papa, I can't talk about it, I can't even think of it and keep cool. I try to keep it out of my thoughts, I did want to go so, papa, — oh, so awfully — and — there, it 's no use! Only don't tell me anything. Cuba 's Cuba and Jerry 's Jerry — and I 'm here, you know, and this is my business, and that 's the long and short of it," he blurted out spasmodically, growing red in the face.

The doctor smiled long and very kindly at him, saying at length: —

"You are quite right, Bob. You do your best with Jerry. That 's your business now. One thing at a time."

"Oh, I 'm doing all right," was the confident reply; "tiptop."

Usually the doctor came once a day, but there

were several days when he came twice, and once he watched through the whole night, for Jerry was dangerously ill, occasionally delirious, and so feeble that at any moment his life might pass away. Amid incoherent, unintelligible ramblings he spoke much of a "garding" and "roses" and "Milly." Noah left his corner, and all night long perched on the bedstead quite near his master, as if desiring to be in the heart of things. His head on one side, his eyes following every movement, he observed in silence all that was done for the sufferer's relief. It was as if the bird knew, thought, remembered, and was listening to Jerry.

At dawn the doctor went home, telling Bob the worst was probably over; the old man's heart was beating more strongly and quietly, he would be apt to sleep for some time now, and Bob should seize the opportunity and sleep a little also. Noah, who had not spoken a word in hours, now remarked pertinently, "Milly's dead," retired to his perch, tucked his head under his wing, and went to sleep in accordance with the doctor's advice.

From that time Jerry's case improved, but not his temper. His state of mind during convalescence was even more acrimonious and saturnine than at the beginning of his illness, and he usually wanted everything at once, so that if Bob had had six hands he could scarcely have satisfied the old man's whims. But either Bob had grown more patient, or familiarity with Jerry's methods had blunted the edge of their discourtesy.

At first he had returned reluctantly to the uninviting sick-room, after his morning and evening hour off duty. Now he was restless when away, eager to be at his post. He was heart and soul in his work, determined to pull Jerry through brilliantly, and justify the doctor's faith. But aside from devotion to his father and the desire to please him, which inspired Bob's vigilance, he was beginning to have, in the unreasoning fashion peculiar to dogs and boys, a sneaking fondness for his miser; not because the latter upon better acquaintance revealed likable traits and latent virtues, but in the first place it was his own particular miser. Not another boy of Bob's

acquaintance had ever nursed a miser, and in all Dole's Mills not a mother's son of them had been polished off in the tiptop style with which he had distinguished Jerry. Then one is apt to like and regard with indulgence what one takes care of. Why not Jerry, as well as the broken-legged robin, or the kitten upon whose luckless tail Claribel May had once unwittingly shut the shed-door? Besides, he liked him for the classic reason that Desdemona liked Othello, — he pitied him.

It was not Jerry's illness that roused Bob's compassion. This he had contemplated with unflinching stolidity. It was not that the man was old, friendless, and alone. Bob perceived it, but being a boy, remained untouched. These facts were remote from him. It was rather a succession of things which set him thinking and finally feeling as he had never before been roused to feel.

It all began in this way. One evening when Jerry was on the road to recovery, but weak, nervous, and exceedingly uncomfortable, Bob asked if he should n't sing something to amuse him.

"'T ain't no amoosement," Jerry informed him promptly and peremptorily.

"I used to sing first-rate, and as high as Melitta, but sometimes my voice cracks like anything nowadays, and sounds like an old tin pan. Perhaps it will go, though." Forthwith he began lustily: —

"'The Campbells are coming, Oho, Oho!'"

"Jes' shet up on them camels, — can't yer?" his invalid remarked with asperity. "Why folks allers wants ter holler I never c'n make out."

"Don't you like singing?" demanded the amazed boy.

"No, I don't."

"Not anybody's?"

"No, I tell yer!"

"Didn't you before you had the smallpox?" persisted Bob, wondering if this might not be a disastrous unforeseen result of the disease.

"No!"

"But you like the piano?"

"Don't nuther."

"Really! Nor the violin?"

"Hate it like pizen."

"Not even a hand-organ?"

"Not a pesky thing that yer c'n thump on or yell at, or thet toots or squeaks or rumbles or wheezes; an' I hope yer satisfied with yer pryin', Bob Rea, an' it 's what I 've said from first to last, if they 'd jess hed forethought an' sen' 'long a full-grown man" —

"Oh, come now, Jerry, give us a rest on that fellow! If you don't get well faster, I shall be full-grown myself before I leave you. Gruel time! Brace up, gran'pa!"

Bob mused long on this phenomenal aversion to music, but the next revelation of the inner Jerry impressed him still more deeply. His amicable intentions to warble having been frustrated, he resolved to tell some stories, remembering that in the interesting measles period of his own existence, they had been, next to vanilla custard, his greatest comfort.

"Do you know the story of Siegfried?" he inquired, shortly after the musical fiasco.

"No, I don't," his patient replied with a suspicious growl, "and what 's more, I don't want ter."

"Oh, you 'll like it," Bob returned cheerily. "It 's in a book of papa's, from the German."

He became vastly interested in his own narration and paid little attention to the invalid, until an uncompromising snore made him aware that he was entertaining only himself.

Upon being questioned later, Jerry replied scornfully: —

"Yer was jawin' away 'bout a snake, 's far ez I kin rekellect."

"It was the best thing you could do, to go to sleep," Bob said with his professional nurse air. "Sleep 's the best medicine. But now you 're wide-awake, and I 'll give you another. Perhaps you 've read Scott's novels?"

"Well, I hain't!" roared Jerry, infuriated.

"Here goes, then, for 'The Talisman.'"

"But I despise yer long-winded yarns! I hate 'em like a house afire."

"No, you don't, Jerry. You never know what 's

good for you. If I'd listened to you you'd have been a cold corpus long ago. You'll like it awfully. Now you simmer down nice and quiet."

In spite of protests and abuse, Bob proceeded upon his benevolent scheme, and talked a long time to his own complete satisfaction.

"And this time, Jerry," he explained with animation, "you see it was again the prince."

"I don't see nuthin' 'bout it."

"Why, yes, you do, because" —

"P'r'aps I ain't a born fool. I tell yer 't ain't so. I don' know what yer jawin' 'bout."

"But, Jerry, don't be such a stick-in-the-mud. See here. What don't you understand? And why don't you understand, when it's all as plain as the nose on your face?" which was as plain as a promontory, Bob privately reflected.

"Cos I hain't ben listenin'," Jerry retorted with an exasperating chuckle. "Cos I jess stuffed the sheet in my ears. Cos I hain't opened a book in forty yearn. Cos I've jogged long so far 'thout enny book-tresh in my head an' I guess I'll keep on

joggin' my own gait," leering maliciously at Bob and enjoying his discomfiture.

"You mean old sneak!"

Bob was startled by the change in Jerry's face. "Yer lie, Bob Rea," — raising himself on his elbow, his voice quivering with indignation. "I ain't no sneak-thief. I never stole a pin in my life. No man livin' c'n say I ain't honest. I 'm sixty-five yearn old, an' nobuddy ever tol' me to my face or behin' my back ez I warn't an honest an' respekterble peddler."

"But I did n't say you stole, Jerry. I never thought of such a thing."

"Yer did."

"Indeed I did n't."

"Yer called me a sneak. Thet 's what yer said. An' a sneak is a man that robs hencoops an' clo'eslines an' sech, an' a sneak ain't no respekterble peddler ez is square in peddlin', an' thet 's what I am, Bob Rea, every time."

"I 'm awfully sorry, Jerry, but really I did n't mean it so. Do lie down and keep quiet. You 'll make

yourself worse if you get so excited. You see you did n't understand. I only meant " —

" I don't keer what yer meant or what yer did n't mean. Yuv no business to tell an honest man he 's a thief. I 'm poor, an' thet ain't no disgrace. I don't set in the lap o' lux'ry like yore folks, ridin' roun' in a buggy an' dawdlin' away their time, thet 'grudge me my keep when I 'm 'flicted of the Lord, an' did n't sen' me a full-grown man to keer for me."

" Poor ! " gasped Bob, overlooking even the taunt at his father's indolence in the dawning conviction that Jerry must be speaking the truth. " You poor ? Not a miser ? "

" Miser ! " shrieked the old man. " Kin I help what a pack o' fools yells at me ? Miser ! I wish I was. Miser ! I ain't no miser, an' I ain't no thief. Miser ! I 'm jes' Jerry Nichols, sixty-five year old, an' a respekterble peddler ez hez peddled my way by the sweat o' my brow accordin' ter the Holy Scriptures, an' I 've stood a good deal from yer, Bob Rea, but I wunt stan' sech lies from anybuddy. Miser !

It's easier lollin' in buggies then trampin' on the road, but honester an respekterbler 't ain't, an' ef I" —

Bob fled from the irate rasping voice, waxing more deeply resentful every moment, and never stopped until he reached his favorite beech and flung himself down. There he lay on his back, staring into the beautiful green roof.

Jerry was only a poor peddler. Jerry was n't a miser. Not a miser at all. Not even a little tiny single bit. Well, that was a stunner! Jerry hated music. It was an ugly noise to him — no more, no less. Did n't seem possible, but it was true.

Jerry despised and loathed "book-tresh" and stories of splendid men and strange lands, and everything that had happened since the world began, kings, and poets, and history, and wars, and such things! He knew nothing of Ulysses, old Ajax, and the other Greek fellows. He had never heard of Alexander — of Cæsar. For him, Barbarossa had never lived. He would snarl with contempt at the story of Roland or of Bayard, and a paper of

pins in his little peddler's cart meant more to him than Shakespeare. It was awful! It was *awful!*

And he had carried that upper story of his about with him sixty-five years, like an empty, dusty garret room, a miserable, narrow little hole, in the bargain. And papa's mind was crowded with splendid things, and like a high, sunny, breezy tower with windows looking out in every direction.

Poor old chap! It was like living in a dungeon. No, it was worse. You could have pleasant thoughts in a dungeon, and even convicts could have something to remember and hang on to; but Jerry had never had anything, and what was worse he did n't know it. He did n't want to be anything but a surly, mean old know-nothing that you could n't touch with a ten-foot pole, without a good word or good thought for anybody, bitter, cross-grained, shut out from everything worth having, and he did n't know any better. And he was n't even a miser. It was an awful pity!

There must be others like him, hundreds of them, perhaps, that never had had any chance, and were n't

misers or anything. Bob felt very queer and uncomfortable about the innumerable multitude of old Jerrys jogging on into desolate age, deaf and blind to the beautiful things in the world. It was a million times better to be hungry for a thing and not get it than not to want anything at all. Now he 'd been hungry enough for Cuba, and was still, away down inside of him, but somehow, bad as it was not to go, he had got something out of it, at least in the first place. His thoughts, his hopes, and all he had seen coming. But that poor old codger in there — What kind of a life was that, anyhow? It did n't seem fair. Bob did n't know whom to blame, but he felt vaguely indignant, his spirit of defense and protection was roused, and from that moment he took sides stoutly for Jerry.

Suddenly he saw Melitta coming along the narrow wood-path with a basket, holding her short skirts ridiculously high, and making kangaroo jumps over boggy places.

V.

BOB laughed, got up and went to meet her, surprised to find himself really glad to see that pert Melitta.

"Hullo, Litt," he called out heartily.

"Oh, stop! Oh, go 'way! Oh, dear me! Shoo! Oh, Bob, do stand still. Please, Bob!" cried the little girl, retreating and shaking her hand at him. "Shoo! Shoo! Go back or I'll run."

He halted, laughing.

"You 're such a goose, Litt."

"You stay just where you are, won't you? Don't you move, not a single little teenty-tonty bit."

He took one stride forward. Back she went with a shriek.

"But why on earth" —

"Because I don't mean to catch it," she retorted

shrilly, gaining courage with distance, and being now some twenty paces off.

"Oh, thunder!" exclaimed Bob, throwing himself down, — choking with laughter, — rolling from side to side and evincing his delight by vigorous kicks.

"If you act that way, I'll go home. I won't give you what I've brought you. I'll eat it myself," she said, pouting.

"But, Melitta, how can you be so silly — with papa, too, coming all the time from every sort of thing?"

"Papa is a doctor and knows how," she retorted severely. "It's quite a different thing. Anybody'd know that. Besides, what makes him keep you off here all this time and not let you come near us if you are n't catching?"

"For the simple reason, Miss Ninny, that he thought I'd do better work so. Besides, you can't be with your patient and at home two miles off all at once. See?"

"Your patient! Oh, what airs!"

"Stay just where you are"

Bob looked at his watch with dignity.

"I shall have to go back before long."

"I should n't think you 'd be so anxious to get back to that hateful crosspatch."

Bob faced her sternly.

"Melitta Rea, if you were a sixty-five-year-old man with the smallpox, that did n't see a wink before your nose for some days, and had never had any fun in your life, and only a gray parrot with a red tail and white rings round his eyes, which makes him look awfully knowing, whose name is Noah, — and had n't a single pleasant thought in your old head or a single pleasant thing to get at, anywhere in the world, and did n't know anything or want to know anything except peddling thread and tape and pins and needles and baking-pans and spruce gum, from morning till night, year in, year out, and had never opened a book in forty years, — not in *f-o-r-t-y y-e-a-r-s !*" he repeated tragically, — "perhaps you 'd be a hateful crosspatch yourself, Melitta Rea, and a good deal hatefuller !"

"Shoo, shoo!" cried Melitta, hopping backward, for Bob in his zeal was approaching. "Stand still, that's a dear! There, — so! Why, anybody'd think you liked him."

"Who's a better right?" he demanded stoutly.

"Well, I never! Do you really?"

"Yes, I do. If you've got any grub, fork it over."

"You need n't be so cross, Bob — when I've come this long way just to bring you things — and it might be my death, too!"

Bob laughed again.

"All right, Melitta. Let's make up."

"Well, — hold out your hands," and she flung a package which he with a bound secured.

"It's doughnuts. Now this."

Whirling high in the air and far to the left came another.

"A girl's throw," he said scornfully. "Fire straight, the way I taught you. Anybody'd think you had no brothers."

"It's molasses candy. I made it for you. It's

burnt, but awfully good. You don't mind its being sticky? It 's the weather, you know."

"Course not. Like it sticky," he returned jovially. "What else?"

"Six green apples. They 've bumped together in my pocket. Besides, the boys and I were playing ball with them. So they are mellow, now, but you don't mind?"

"Like them mellow," he said affably.

"Here are peanuts. There! That was n't a girl's throw, Bob! And here comes a book Phil sent. Travels. Perhaps you can read it to Jerry."

"Perhaps I shall do no such thing. Perhaps I know best what suits my patient."

"Dearie me, how high and mighty! Look out now for green gooseberries, good and sour and puckery, Bob, from the shady bush. Oh, dear, they 're all in the dirt! I thought that paper was rather thin."

"I like them just as well," he assured her cheerfully. "It 's clean dirt."

"And then there 's the blanc-mange. It 's here in

the basket. I can't throw it very well because it's in a dish. So I 'll leave it on this stone, but don't you come till I 've run away. I told mamma I would n't make it for an old miser! And she only laughed and said it would taste as cool to an old miser's throat as to a little magpie girl's."

"Melitta," said Bob with mournful reluctance, "Jerry is n't a miser. He does n't miser worth a cent. You 'll have to tell the boys."

"He is n't a miser?" ejaculated the child.

He shook his head.

"Not a miser!" she repeated, staring.

"No," he replied dejectedly.

"Then what in the world is he, anyhow?" she demanded with indignation. "The mean old thing! When the boys and I had it all fixed that he 'd die and leave you his money-bags!"

A queer conscious grin flitted across Bob's face. Not in greed, but in romantic castle-building, had this conventional scheme of poetical justice occurred to his imagination also, as an alluring possibiiity. In stories such things happened.

"He 's nothing, nothing at all, just an old peddler. But the boys need n't hoot at him any more or I 'll hoot them. You tell them that, will you? It was awfully good of you to trot down with all these things. Give my love to everybody. Tell mamma when she makes ginger-snaps to drop a tear for the absent. And now look out, Litt! I 'm coming! Wh-o-o-p!"

He strode forward, while she, with a succession of little shrieks at the advancing contagion, kangarood herself out of sight.

"Jerry," said Bob as he entered, "take your drops, please," which was an entirely novel mode of address. Ordinarily the various potions were presented to the invalid with: —

"Time 's up. Gulp her down. It is not a dye. Here goes!" or "Here you are, gran'pa! Children cry for it. At it! One, two, and down!"

"Here is some very nice blanc-mange that my mamma sends you."

Jerry's only sign of acknowledgment was a dubious "H'm!"

Tasting it, he remarked : —

" 'T ain't a puddin' I 'm pertickerly fond of, but it 's better 'n nuthin' ; " whereupon he devoured all of it greedily.

After a while he said : —

" Did she make it puppus for me ? "

" Yes, on purpose for you."

Another pause.

" I s'pose yer hev sech puddin's oftentimes ter yore house."

" Not every day, but we always have something good on Sunday."

Jerry reflected some moments before closing the conversation with a snappy : —

" Well, I s'pose it warn't no great trouble to speak of, jess to make a little mite o' puddin' like thet; " and Bob meekly said he did n't suppose it was.

" Ha, ha, ha ! " laughed Noah.

" He 's such a splendid parrot, Jerry."

" Where 's Milly ? " Noah went on. " Poor Milly ! "

" Jerry," said Bob, suddenly mustering up his

courage, "who was Milly?" expecting in reply nothing less than a gigantic burst of wrath.

"Milly? Why, Milly," answered the old man with a certain eager quaver in his voice, "she was my little sister."

"Oh — and she died?"

"Yes. Milly, she died."

Was it old Jerry Nichols speaking in this quiet, friendly way, with no scowl on his face?

"She was jess the pootiest leetle thing thet ever you see," he continued in his suddenly resurrected human tone. "She hed curls. Ye'd oughter hev seen Milly's curls. Thet leetle tot up to yore house thet's allers bareheaded in the garding" —

"It's our Claribel May," the boy said, wondering, doubting his senses, as he listened to this slow, meditative, communicative, transformed Jerry.

"When the sun shines on them long curls o' hern, she jess makes me think o' Milly. An' I've kalkerlated to git a peek at thet chil' oftentimes, it 'd be so kin' o' nateral to see a leetle girl thet's like Milly, but ez soon ez I git near the gate, you an'

them bruthern o' yo'rn allers sets up sech a hullerberloo an' yellin', an' screech 'Miser' an' sech sass et me, thet I jess jog on smart."

Bob's throat felt puffy, so he said nothing. In all his life he had never been so sorry and so heartily ashamed of himself.

"Somebuddy said you was goin' off somewheres, an' I was mighty gled of it. Thinks I to myself, I 'll git a peek et thet chil' with them long curls when thet Bob Rea ain't there to holler, an' rile me up, an' drive me 'way from thet garding-gate."

"Oh, Jerry," stammered Bob, full of contrition, "I 'm awfully sorry! When you get well you shall walk straight into the garden and look at Claribel May as much as you please."

Jerry moved about nervously, and finally said with visible agitation: —

"She would n't sass me, would she?"

"She? Oh no, she 's a good little thing."

"Cos 't would n't be nateral, it 'd kinder tetch me ef she should talk sassy, leastwise ef she looks like Milly, which her curls they does mos' pertickerly, an'

I git a peek et leetle girls with them long, shiny curls allers, an' thet leetle tot's curls, they resembles to Milly's most surprisin', — bein' ez they 've gut thet pooty cheerful color, yer know, — suthin' 'tween a sorrel hoss an' a oak-leaf in the fall of the year, — an' shiny, shiny ez gless. So I 'd ruther not hev her sass me."

"She won't, Jerry. She does n't know how. She 's a kind little thing. She is n't like me and the boys. She 'll talk to you, too, she 's such a chatterbox and not a bit afraid of strangers. She 'll show you her doll and everything. I promise you she will, for she 's awfully sweet and jolly as a cricket. And if any of the boys bother you when you are with Claribel May, I 'll knock 'em end over end, I promise you that too!"

"Oh," sighed Jerry, "I jes' can't help hopin' an' believin' she looks like Milly. Now I 'm kinder scared to ask yer, cos p'r'aps Clary Bell 's eyes air blue, blue eyes bein' what suits mostly to them pertikerler shiny curls. Yer see I 'm allers a-huntin' fur a chil' thet resembles to Milly, an' peddlin'

roun' year efter year I see a sight o' young uns. Once I gut the curls pooty akkerit, but the eyes, Luddy, they was a diserpintmunt! Chiny blue, an' squint, an' ez narrer ez buttonholes. An' p'r'aps 'fore I go any further, I 'd better find out right away 'bout Clary Bell's eyes, cos ef they air squinty-blue an' a diserpintmunt" —

"But they are n't! They are not blue at all. Claribel 's got splendid eyes, wide-open, a queer color — a kind of" —

"Yaller brown?" demanded Jerry excitedly.

"Yes, hazel, they call it; very clear" —

"Luddy," exclaimed the old man, sitting upright in his bed, and clasping his hands, "thet 's it, thet 's Milly's pooty eyes, eggsakly!"

"An' a leetle smily mouth?"

"A nice little mouth, yes."

"An' a dimple in the left cheek?"

"Well, I can't exactly remember, but somehow I think there must be," Bob declared recklessly.

Jerry sank back exhausted.

"Ef I warn't so tired out I 'd git up an' go an'

see this very minnit. Cos if it 's goin' to be a diserpintmunt, ez things air mostly, I 'd better hev it over with, an' jog on."

"You could n't go yet, Jerry. Besides, Claribel 's asleep. But as soon as papa will let you, I 'll drive you over myself."

"In thet buggy ? "

"Yes."

"H'm ! "

Bob gave his patient a refreshing drink, and after a while asked timidly : —

"When Milly died was she as little as Claribel May ? "

"Not eggsackly, p'r'aps. But I mostly think o' Milly ez a leetle wee tot, cos we was together then. Father, he was gard'ner, yer know, an' I was jes' big enough to help, an' Milly used to play roun' bareheaded, an' her curls all shiny, an' it come sudden ; father, he was runned over by the ingine, a-crossin' the track with his leetle vegterble-cart, an' mother she died of herself pretty quick, an' then we was all broke up, an' they boun' me out, an' 'dopted Milly,

cos she was pooty ez a peach; an' she pined, an' Noah pined" —

"Noah?"

"Why, yer see, Noah, he was always there. Uncle, he was a sea-capting, an' brung Noah from furrin parts, an' when we was broke up, they 'dopted Noah 'long with Milly, an' when Milly, she pined an' died, I got Noah back agin an' we 've stuck together ever sence."

The bird clambered down to the table near the bed, said nothing, but cocked his head sociably and looked preternaturally intelligent.

"I could n't git to see Milly often, bein' a boun' boy. It used to harrer me all up, I was thet parshul to her. An' once I went, an' she was all dead and buried, dead an' gone, an' I never know'd nuthin' 'bout it. An' thet mos' broke me to pieces. An' then there was jess Noah an' me. He 's awful old. An' he knows more 'n all the folks yer ever see. He understan's everythin', an' kin talk more 'n you guess, but he 's 'lone so much while I 'm on the road, he gits kinder silunt and broody, an' not ez sosherbul

ez he used to be. Once, a man — rich ez mud thet man wuz — cum an' offered me a hund'ed dollars fur him. I jess laffed in his face. 'Mister,' sez I, 'you 'd sell yore old ma quicker 'n I 'd sell my Noah.' Why, Noah, he 'd never git more 'n a rod away from Milly — In the garding, there by the rose-bushes, both of 'em chipper an' talkin' to theirselves — an' allers — the best o' fren's " —

He spoke slowly, gently, with long pauses.

"And is that all, Jerry?"

"All?"

"All you ever had, all you ever did, in your life?" asked the boy, awestruck.

"Hed? Did? Don' know what yer mean. Should think I 'd hed an' did more 'n most folks, seein' ez I 'd ben peddlin' on the road more 'n forty-five yearn. First I was a boun' boy. Then I got a place in a store, but I never was good at liftin'; besides, I was oneasy in thar. Nobuddy wanted me in a garding. So I took to peddlin', an' hev kep' at it ever sence. It 's a respekterble bizniss, an' yer ain't shet up. 'T ain't so payin' ez some p'r'aps, but seein' ez there

was only Noah an' me, it hez sooted us pooty middlin','' he concluded superbly, somewhat as an Augsburg patrician might have alluded to his ventures by land and sea.

Poor Bob longed to speak, but did not know how to express his pity for a half century of such dreariness, with but one sweet memory shining down all those dull, desolate, miserable years.

"Milly 's dead," croaked Noah. "Pretty Milly. Dead, dead, dead."

"It 's such a pity Milly died," the boy said with awkward kindness. "If she had n't, you would n't be so alone, you know, and" —

"Law sakes, Bob Rea!" exclaimed the old man, "how you do talk!" yet his voice sounded not ill-pleased. "What in the world would I do with a leetle girl? Jess think o' me gone on the road two days — four days — sometimes a week. I could n't take keer o' her proper either. I ain't so handy ez I wuz. But there now! 'T ain't no use a-talkin', — sence she died — Jess the pootiest leetle tot — an' spry — an' chipper — an' smart — an' long, shiny" —

Jerry had fallen asleep.

His young remorseful watcher then and there vowed never again in his life to be hateful to any living creature, man, or beast, or bird; for you did n't know what harm you were doing, because you could n't get inside people's horrid mean ways, and see into their hearts, and the part of their lives they cared for.

VI.

WHEN Jerry awoke, his soft mood had vanished. Bob ventured to allude to Claribel May, whereupon the old man snarled: —

"Well, ef I come, an' I ain't sure ez I shell, I ain't no beggar, an' yer ma need n't s'pose I 'm tryin' to force my wares on her, though she might hev bought her bakin'-pans an' sech o' me years sence, ef I do say so."

"She will, Jerry. You 'll see. She 'll buy lots of you," Bob declared with enthusiasm.

The old man sniffed and scolded and railed, and was not to be appeased or approached, but Bob did n't mind. He had learned something that he never forgot. He learned much, indeed, in Jerry's house, how much he did not suspect till he was many years older.

He had been there nearly three weeks when his papa said one morning: —

"I 'm going to send a man to relieve you to-night, Bob. Jerry requires less care each day now and will soon be on his feet. You 'll be glad enough to come home, won't you? And you 're looking a little pale and really ought to be released. You 've nursed my very worst case for me, my boy, and successfully," putting his hands on Bob's shoulders and looking affectionately at him.

"But papa, I can't leave until Jerry is up. How can I pass him along to that other fellow who does n't know anything about him and might give him a what-do-you-call-it — a relapse? You would n't want a man you 'd nursed to relapse, now would you, papa? Jerry is very peculiar. You have to understand him, you know. But when you do, he 's a first-rate fellow. No, no, papa, you would n't do it yourself. You would n't leave a patient without finishing him up all serene and handsome. Of course I want to come home like everything, but I should be awfully uncomfortable not to polish Jerry off all complete, and I could n't have another fellow meddling with my patient anyhow."

So Bob stayed until Jerry was able to walk about his room and take a few steps in the sunshine before the house, but at last he was well enough to be left alone, and it was really time to go.

Jerry sat in a comfortable chair which Mrs. Rea had sent him. Bob had prepared himself for his return to civilization precisely as his father had instructed him, had made his last tour, and assured himself that he was leaving his realm in good order.

"Well, Jerry, good-by. Everything is all right, I think. The things to take are on the shelf, all labeled, and the things to eat are in the cupboard. I 'll be over soon to look after you, and the minute papa will let you come, I 'll call for you with the buggy, and drive you over to see Claribel May."

Jerry screwed his face into a thousand wrinkles and was silent.

"I 've pulled you through pretty well now, have n't I, Jerry?" the boy went on, more glad than boastful. "You were a mighty sick man, you

know, and just look at yourself! Just think how you go about, and how you eat!"

He stood back and surveyed the frail, unsightly old man with as much enthusiasm as if he were a trained athlete.

It was Jerry's most aggressive, grating voice that drawled: —

"Well, Bob Rea, ez I come uv er long-lived race, 'ceptin' for ingines an' sech, mos' likely I should hev worrit through all by myself, whether or no, but I do s'pose, ef they 'd sen' 'long a full-grown man, — ez they certainly ought ter hev done, — it would n't hev ben so all-fired tejus. It stan's to reason that a full-grown man hez gut more fak'lty at nussin' then a sassy boy, an' would hev done his nussin' bizniss up smart, stid o' dawdlin' roun' here more 'n three weeks, an' thet I shell allers say."

Bob, too inexperienced to comprehend that the proud Spanish hidalgo and the prouder Yankee rustic have a kindred reluctance to acknowledge an obligation or yield themselves to the beneficent in-

fluences of gratitude, stared blankly at him for some moments, before answering: —

"All right, Jerry. Never mind. This is a free country. Say whatever you like. Have it your own way. I hope you 'll sleep like a log. Good-by."

He shook the old man's hand heartily and went out briskly, but when he had gone but a few yards involuntarily began to loiter, reluctant to leave the scene of his engrossing labors and strangely uneasy. It seemed hardly natural or right to go away. An irresistible impulse made him retrace his steps. Perhaps, after all, he had forgotten something. Perhaps there was still something he could do. Through the open window he saw Jerry in the arm-chair, with Noah on his hand.

"Say it, Noah. Speak up nice and pooty. Clary Bell. They say yer can't teach old dogs noo tricks, but you kin do it, Noah, ef yer want ter. Clary Bell. Thet 's thet leetle girl's name, Noah. An' it would seem nateral ef you should speak up to her direkly an' perlite. Cos she 'll take to you, Noah,

sure; an' cole chills, they jess crip down the spine o' my back when I kinder see her hevin' a sudding dislikin' agin me. CLARY BELL. CLARY. CLARY BELL. An' you could okkerpy her kin' er pleasin' like while she's gittin' 'quainted with me. Cos, Noah, I ain't so spry ez I used to be, an' ez I'm allers on the road I've furgutt'n them leetle play-tricks I knowed how to do fur Milly. An' bein' ez I'm ruther slow an' rusty" — he smiled in apologetic, embarrassed, appealing fashion in the face of his one friend — "an' not certing the very first minnit what sech a pooty leetle miss pertickerly hankers arter, ef you'd speak up smart to her, I could be thinkin' up them pleasin' play-tricks. CLARY BELL. There ain't no young bird in the world ez c'n say thet leetle girl's name ez pooty ez you, Noah, ef yer jess hev a mind."

Bob did not wait to see if Noah had a mind, but stole softly away.

His home had never looked so lovely and so large as when he tramped in, gave his mamma a bear-hug, kissed all the children in turn and out of turn, began

again and went the rounds, and did not know where or when to stop. It seemed as if he had been absent years.

Beside the excitement of the welcome, the children were wild with mischief and merriment, whispered, giggled slyly, and had to be frequently called to order, and reminded to wait till papa came.

His entrance was the signal for an overwhelming outburst of shrill and rapid disjointed remarks, accompanied by a kind of Indian war-dance, performed by Melitta, Ned, and Phil.

"You 're going!"

"He 's waiting!"

"It 's just the same as it was before."

"He said he would n't go without you."

"'T is n't the Beautiful Bess."

"It 's the Mary Jane."

"But it 's just as good a ship."

"Is n't he nice to wait?"

"It 's his mamma that makes him."

"No, it 's Harry."

"'T is n't."

"'T is."

"It 's all of them. They all want Bob."

"They say you 're unselfish!"

"Hoo! If they should just see you grab the biggest piece of mince-pie!"

"And they say they 'll wait a year for you."

"I would n't!"

Bob, bewildered, doubtful, wildly eager, pushed the little howling dervishes out of the way, and turned, his whole heart in his eyes, to his father.

"Papa!"

"It 's true, Bob. You are going to Cuba. Harry is waiting for you."

Bob caught his breath, turned very red, opened his mouth and shouted at the top of his voice, —

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" in which the children joined lustily.

The tumult having subsided, —

"When?" demanded Bob abruptly and with some anxiety.

"The first of September."

He smiled rapturously.

"All right. That 's time enough;" and, before asking for or giving further explanations, he ran up to the garret, two steps at a time, followed by his jubilant satellites, shouldered and brought down in triumph the little trunk, from which he had parted in bitter grief, and placed it on the floor in the middle of his own room, where he could gloat over it to repletion for a whole month yet.

It was towards the last of August before Dr. Rea allowed Bob to bring Jerry over. Melitta, fortified by a cup of peppermint tea — prescribed, made, and sweetened by herself — and a handkerchief saturated with camphor, took a discreet position on the veranda, behind the honeysuckle, to see the ex-miser and his parrot go by. The little boys, forbidden to leave the house, flattened their noses against the dining-room window panes.

Bob, nearly as shaky as old Jerry, who was plainly much agitated and frightened, led him to a garden bench, and retired behind a lilac-bush, having been instructed by Mrs. Rea to leave him alone with Claribel.

At some distance down the path, between rows of high bushes, stood a small white figure in the sunshine.

Jerry rose, walked a few steps feebly, returned to the bench and sat down, his head in his hands.

"Where 's Milly?" called Noah.

In response, Claribel May came straight toward her guests, as fast as her short fat legs could carry her.

"Mornin', man!" she said, smiling with wonder and delight at the big bird that perched on the back of the rustic-seat, and did not fly away when little girls came near.

"Pretty Milly!" remarked Noah, his head most fascinatingly on one side.

"Pretty talky-bird!" answered the child, laughing, making rings with her fingers and peeping through them at him.

"Oh, Luddy!" murmured Jerry.

"What 's the matter, man?" she asked cheerfully.

No reply.

"Want papa? Want mamma?"

He shook his head.

"Sick? B'oke you' leg? Feel pitty bad?"

Still he could not speak.

"Man, 'peak when you're 'poken to!" she said, in the serious manner of her papa reprimanding the boys.

"Where's Milly? Pretty Milly!" called the bird.

She poked Jerry to rouse him.

"What's talky-bird's name?"

"Noah," he stammered.

"What's you' name, man?"

"Jerry."

She looked up into his wizened, ugly, disfigured old face with her clear and fearless eyes, and, accustomed to receiving strangers with pressing needs, chirped encouragingly: —

"Well, Jelly? What you want?"

She was close to his knee. He slowly lifted his shriveled hand and, watching her anxiously, laid it one instant lightly on her hair, then covered his face and sobbed.

"He slowly lifted his shriveled hand"

"Don't ky, Jelly," she said cheerily. "Here," thrusting her rag baby at him for comfort, and speedily bringing up a cart and a little basket of currants.

"Don' be skeered, leetle miss," he faltered as soon as he could find his voice. "I ain't a-goin' ter worrit yer. An' ef you okkerpy yerself with Noah, ef you don' mind I 'll jes' stay a while an' look at yer, an' ez soon ez I kin rekerlek, I 'll git up some pleasin' play-tricks for yer, but I 've ben joggin' on the road so long, an' it 's so many years sence, I ain't gut the fak'lty ez I hed. But ez soon ez I kin, I 'll git 'em up for yer, them play-tricks, ez I used to do fur a leetle girl with jes' yore shiny curls an' jes' yore pertikerler colored eyes, ez also called me Jelly, an' made rings with her pooty leetle fingers an' peeked through 'em at Noah, ez like you ez two peas, an' hed a white frock in a garding an' a laughy voice; an' ef you don't mind — Clary Bell" —

"Clary Bell," repeated Noah with distinguished success.

The child laughed merrily.

— "ef you don' mind I 'll jess set quiet-like, cos I 'm ruther queer and faint-like an' shaky, hevin' ben sick." He closed his eyes some moments. "But don't be skeered, Clary Bell"—

"Clary Bell," echoed Noah.

— "an' pooty soon I 'll git up them play-tricks."

In all his broken, agitated sentences, the little girl recognized one familiar and engaging word.

"Jelly play?" she asked blithely. "Play with Claribel May?"

"Oh, anythin', anythin'," he exclaimed with his painful dry sobs, "anythin', ef yer 'll jess keep on talkin' so pooty, an' not bein' skeered any more than ef yer was Milly herself, an' the same garding, an' all back agin! Luddy, Luddy!"

"Talky-bird play, too?" she demanded serenely.

"Ef Noah 'll play with yer? Well, he jess will! And he knows how. A mos' intellig'nt bird, Clary Bell. You never see a bird ez knowin' ez Noah in all yer life. He knows everythin'. An' he rekerleks the garding an' all of it jess like yisterday. There 's things yer can't forget, Clary Bell, not ef

yer on the road a hund'ud years, an' Noah he 's jess the same. He don't forget nuther. He an' I, we 've stuck together ever sence. An' when you make rings with your fingers, an' try to look jes' like him, he jes' laughs inside, an' feels choky all to once't, cos it is so nateral, leetle Clary Bell, so mos' pertikerly nateral."

She was employed in stroking Noah's plumage the wrong way, and rubbing currants, sticks, and all manner of refreshments on his beak, which attentions he took in good part, talking much in an animated and artistic manner. Finally, intent on great plans, with many adjusting pats and much chattering, she made Jerry sit in the middle of the bench, holding Noah on one hand, the rag doll in the other, the cart between his feet, toes turned in, while she, sweet and serious, talking to herself, trotted down the path, seeking some object indispensable to the execution of her baby-schemes.

Bob emerged from his hiding-place.

Jerry, clutching his rag doll, cart, and Noah, remained as rigid as a soldier presenting arms.

"Them cu'n'ts," he remarked in a dry as dust voice and with a meditative sidelong glance, "air pooty backud fur the seas'n an' thet corn is miser'ble. Yore folks hain't gut much fak'lty fur gardings, I shell allers say."

"It's all right, mamma," Bob reported breathlessly. "He'd dance a hornpipe or climb a tree if Claribel told him to. And would you believe it, he talks to her as if she were forty, and the little thing looks up as pleasant and polite as if she understood. But when he put out his hand, as frightened as if he thought she'd break or fly away, and touched her curls, you'd never have believed it was Jerry. He's peculiar, you know, mamma, but when you understand him, he's a first-rate fellow, first-rate," he assured her warmly, glowing with pleasure at the perfect success of the meeting.

The last evening before Bob's departure, he was busy choosing books to take and to leave, and in consideration of his long absence, increasing years, and the prospective dignity of college, was bequeathing various valued possessions to his brothers and Melitta.

Little Phil, looking up from the floor where he sat cross-legged, called out: —

"I say, Bob, this Swiss fellow here, Arnold von Winkelried, in your 'Tales of Heroes,' who rushed on the Austrian Lances and got his body full of 'em just to make a path for his countrymen to get in with their clubs and short swords, did he know all the time that he was a hero?"

Swiftly descended the elder-brother thunderbolt:

"Of course, you copper-toed innocent! They always know that they are heroes. Why, that's what keeps up their courage!"

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